DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 407 CS 504 974

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TITLE Children's Ads Don't Just Sell, They Also Teach Language Well.
PUB DATE May 85
NOTE 55p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (76th, Providence, RI, May 2-5, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cartoons; Child Development; Child Language; *Childrens Television; *Language Acquisition; Language Skills; Models; Nonverbal Communication; Speech Communication; Speech Skills; *Television Commercials; *Television Research; *Television Viewing

ABSTRACT

Prompted by the concern of parents and educators with both the process of a child's language acquisition and the amount of time spent watching television, a content analysis of children's television commercials was conducted to see if this form of mass media could be used to stimulate language skills in children. The 36 commercials were drawn from children's classic cartoons that aired in the early morning before children attended school. The language skills under examination were semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, and pragmatics. Also recorded were the use of cliches and slang words, the inclusion of foreign accents and voice deviations, the pacing of commercials and the kind of visual stimuli offered and whether these stimuli corresponded to the verbal language offered in the commercials. From the findings it was concluded that television commercials served as excellent speech and language models in that more abstract words and complete sentences were featured. Grammatically correct sentences with good articulation and voice modulation were also evident. In addition, commercials offered good pragmatic skills such as turn taking, speaker sensitivity, prosocial models, and the logical order of events. (HOD)

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Children's Ads Don't Just Sell, They Also Teach Language Well

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Paper presented to the Eastern Communication Association Meeting, Providence, Rhode Island, May 1985.

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Abstract

Parents and educators alike are concerned with both the process of a child's language acquisition and the amount of time spent watching television. The researchers conducted a content analysis of children's television commercials to see if this form of mass media could be used to stimulate language skills in children.

The researchers conducted a thorough review of the literature investigating both the factors contributing to normal language development as well as critical research into the effects of television on children. The review of the literature found that appropriate parent-child interaction is key to the quality of the language developed by the child. Despite the many criticisms lodged against the passive viewing of television, some researchers acknowledge educative elements of television programs such as: visual imagery, character development, logical sequence of action and vocabulary building.

The language skills under examination were: semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology and pragmatics. Areas outside the review of the literature that became apparent during the commercial's testing were: use of voice and foreign accents.

The representative commercials (N=36) were drawn from

children's classic cartoons that aired early morning before children attend school (Thursday and Friday, November 26-27, 1984, 6:30AM-9:30AM on WPIX-TV and WOR-TV, New York).

The descriptive study details the availability of good language models on television commercials. The researchers conclude that television commercials serve as excellent speech and language models in that more abstract words and complete sentences are featured. Grammatically correct sentences with good articulation and voice modulation are also evident. Good pragmatic skills such as: turn taking, speaker sensitivity, pro-social models, the logical order of events, and provision of correct information were offered.

This study is complemented by a series of guidelines for parents and educators on the instructive use of children's commercials to reinforce and promote positive language skills. As parents and educators are both concerned with the quantity of the time spent watching television, the paramount question is the quality of parent-chil interaction. This study is significant in that it goes counter to television critics to demonstrate the positive and instructive use of television commercials in acquiring and reinforcing language skills.

Introduction

Parents and educators alike are concerned with the process of their children's language development. The child's linguistic environment and situational as well as social contexts are critical to this maturational process. An environment characterized by a rich verbal interchange enhances language acquisition. The language environment can take on different forms, one of which is the direct face-to-face contact between parent and child. A second form is the communication received by the child when watching television programs.

What has alarmed parents and educators is the decreased time spent in parent-child interaction as opposed to the increased time children spend watching television. Can parents and educators use television as a tool to foster better language development?

This study examined children's television commercials to test for the appropriateness of the language models presented. We will also discuss how parents can use children's T.V. commercials as a means to stimulate discourse.

Factors That Contribute To Normal Language Development

For language to develop adequately in young children whose linguistic system is in a developmental or transition stage a rich verbal environment is most important. It is also essential for the child to experience a dynamic verbal interchange with parents or guardians who are sensitive to their needs and regulate their language input to encourage the child's verbalizations while allowing for creative thinking and concept formation.

Bondurant, Romeo and Kretchmer (1983) compared the linguistic behavior of the mothers of language delayed children with mothers of children developing normally in language. It was concluded that the mothers of the language delayed children were providing them with shorter utterances, were more directive in their responses and used fewer questions. The mothers of the children developing language normally used more acceptance utterances. These authors referred to Nelson (1973) who found that the mothers in her study who were highly directive with their children interferred with the process of vocabulary building. She further claimed that directives or commands which was only significant in relation to age two vocabulary seemed to restrict the child's concept formation by mother substituting her concept selection for the child's.

Holzman (1972) claims that mother is the primary caretaker for her child and is also principal teacher, providing the basis for much of the child's learning. It was noted that in middle-class discourse, there is a preference for giving implicit directions such as," I can't wash your hands unless you put the beads down," in opposition to direct orders. It was stated that children who haven't received this type of communication prior to school entrance do not realize this type of direction for his/her behavior.

Morris (1955) also suggests that if a child is not exposed to verbalizations containing implicit directions for his/her behavior, s/he can develop a language deficit in the area of pragmatics. It was concluded that this becomes noticeable in the school environment, as the school subject matter becomes more abstract and analytical. Lack of experience with implicit, logical and empirical linguistic relationships that need application by the child may contribute to his/her academic difficulties.

Bernstein (1967) has proposed that the frequent use of short commands is one of the features which characterizes lower-class language use. This obviously puts the child at a disadvantage in a middle-class educational environment.

Wulbert, Inglis, Kriegsmann, and Mills (1975) indicated that research has suggested that a dynamic verbal interchange is essential to the development of language. This occurs when mother gives positive responses to the child's attempts to use verbal communication and also modifies her own verbal output to meet the child's ability to respond.

Lieven, et. al. (1978) reported differences in the conversational interactions between two mothers and their children. The researchers claimed that one mother was highly responsive to her child, producing speech in close relation to her child's conversations. The other mother in the study failed to respond 54% of the time and her speech was less dependent on her child's and less accepting of it. Differences in the children's speech styles were noted, and the authors stated that the way in which a child speaks may influence language input received by other people.

Newhoff and Browning (1983) claim that utterances which are directly related to the child's comment or objects of attention, have been implicated as facilitative in the language acquisition process.

Snow (1977) suggests that the use of input modifications help to maintain dialogue and to engage in conversation with a conversationally underdeveloped partner. Brown (1977) also suggests that parental input modifications insure communication and keep both adult and child conversationally focused.

Snow et. al, (1977) compared the speech of mothers to their children. It was found that there is a maternal speech adjustment when mothers interact with their children. This adjustment has been described by speech that is syntactically simple, highly redundant, fluent and well formed.

The research indicated that parents of language delayed children exhibit a different style of interaction with their youngsters than parents of normally developing children. It was also cited in the literature that older siblings of language delayed children communicate differently with them than older siblings of normal language developing children.

Wel[illegible]n and Broen (1982) read a story to normal and language-disordered children in the presence of their normal, older siblings. Questions were then asked of the younger siblings and observations were made of the interactions that took place between the older siblings of both the normal and language disorded children. It was found that interupptions between both groups of older siblings took place with equal frequency. However, the older siblings of the language disordered children directly answered questions addressed to their younger siblings.

In opposition to this, when questions were addressed to the younger, normal children, the older siblings used prompts or rephrasing of of the question to help the younger child.

In another study, questions were asked after a story was read to a group of language-delayed children, older children with normal language development and to a group of younger children with normal language development. The older siblings interruptions of the question-answer dialogue of younger normal children and language delayed children were qualitatively different. Older siblings tended to directly answer questions addressed to language-delayed children rather than to provide prompts or rephrasings of the question as they did for young normal children. Siblings of both the language-delayed and the young normal children interrupted more frequently as the questions increased in difficulty. (Pillsbury and Broen, 1982).

According to Lasky and Klopp (1982) interactions between young children and their parents or guardians are critical factors in child language acquisition. These authors described verbal and nonverbal communication patterns that occurred in parent-child interactions with normally developing children and children with language disorders. The authors concluded that the frequency of use of verbal or nonverbal interactions or mean length of utterance was the same for both groups. However, Lasky and Klopp did find that the mother's frequency of interactions as expansions, use of questions, answers, acknowledgements, providing information and total nonverbal behaviors were all related to some measures of the normal child's linguistic maturity. It should be noted that these interaction patterns were not the same for the language disordered child and their mothers.

Newport, Gleitman, and Gleitman (1977) suggest that expansions could aid in syntactic development, and that repetition of maternal utterances allow for rehearsal and comparison, which might facilitate both vocabulary and syntactic development. Nelson, Carskaddon and Bonvillian (1973) found that expansions facilitate language acquisition when sentences of a new syntactic form, relating to the child's preceding utterance, are also provided.

Nelson, Carskaddon and Bonvillian (1973) observed syntax development in young children over a period of 22 sessions of verbal interaction. In response to the child's sentences, experimenters in the sessions replied with recast sentences that maintained the same basic meaning but provided new syntactic information. The results of this study concluded that the 22 sessions of verbal interaction significantly facilitated syntax acquisition.

Millet and Newhoff (1978) transcribed a communication interchange between a mother and her normally developing son. From the transcription the researchers conclude that the mother is providing the child with additional semantic information. While mother seems to be following the child's conversational lead, she is also demonstrating sentence structure variation.

Cross (1978) observed that mothers of language-advanced children appeared to direct their children's behavior less often. Furthermore, following a child-initiated utterance, these mothers were most likely to respond with a semantic extension. From these results, Cross concludes that an increase in language acquisition rate was most closely tied to the frequency of caretaker utterances that were semantically in tune with the child's verbalizations and objects of attention.

According to Nelson (1981) children develop different learning styles in the acquisition of language. These styles reflect differences in the language model provided, individual preferance and the situational context. She followed 18 children longitudinally from one to 2½ years of age. Individual approaches to the task of learning language was found. Nelson referred to one group of children as the referential group and the other group of children were referred to as the expressive group. One major difference among others that Nelson found between the two groups of children were greater numbers of different words used in the referential group as compared to the expressive children. Also, in their early multi-word utterances the referential children used primarily nouns whereas the expressive children used pronouns preferentially in their sentences. This difference disappeared as the referential children began to use more pronouns in more complete sentences at a later age. What the author found was a significant relationship between the mother's noun/pronoun ratio and the child's suggesting that there is a positive correlation between the language the child uses and the language s/he is exposed to. This author also claimed that research seems to indicate that for "some children it is easy to learn nouns but less easy to learn pronouns and for the other child, the opposite is true."

According to Fisher and Lyons (1974) psycholinguistic research on language acquisition indicates that a rich language environment, and the opportunity for children to use language in a variety of contexts are both significant in further developing the language children bring to school. Language skills are acquired by the child when s/he is exposed to a variety of sentence structures and new vocabulary words used in a meaningful context.

Menyuk (1964) and Slobin (1966) found that by age 3½ or 4 most children have mastered the basic structures of their language. Most of the transformations can be operated and the basic sentence patterns are there in that the children are using them.

Nelson (1981) claims that children learn the syntatic patterns from the words they encounter and then apply these patterns or "formulas" to the new words they meet, using their individual strategies for learning.

Fisher and Lyons (1974) claim that group discussion in the classroom help children develop cognitive skills as one piece of information is related to the next. In oral discussions ideas are also compared, interrelationships are set up and inferences are drawn. Oral discussions should reflect the children's interests, and the pattern of interchange should emerge through questioning technique. Skill in asking as well as answering questions is a prerequisite for children to handle independent group discussions.

Loban (1963) took 338 kindergarten children and charted their language growth over a period of seven years. He concluded that reading, writing, listening and speaking show a positive correlation and that ability in oral verbal skills is a good predictor of reading ability.

Wilkinson (1974) claims that a child draws upon his/her prior knowledge when learning to read. Children have a larger vocabulary and a basic knowledge of sentence structures as well as oral skill than they encounter in their reading textbooks. The researcher further stated that in the process of reading, the child uses skills s/he already has.

Many of the sentences that are read in books have not been spoken before, but the vocabulary and sentence structure in which the child has prior knowledge of will have to be organized. Organizing and understanding the written material is considered by Wilkinson to be a linguistic and thinking process and not specifically a reading process. New and unusual ideas as well as metaphorical language are modifications of familiar semantic ones that are deeply established in the learner.

When a school-aged youngster reads from his/her text in school prior linguistic knowledge is brought to the reading environment. It is at this time that the youngsters language skills are being used as a tool, to understand new and novel ideas and to interpret new information into events that are meaningful to him/her. An interaction between the reader and author of a book takes place as the student must utilize a certain degree of mental activity and critical reading skills to analyze systematically what the author is trying to say.

A growing child has a need for mental activity that will sharpen and challenge his/her already developing linguistic skills. Again, by using language, thinking and reasoning skills become sharpened. The greater the child's verbal opportunities to express his/her opinions and ideas the child will develop better rational, verbal thinking skills.

According to Winn (1977) when children are deprived of the utilization of their developing language skills, it is not only the child's actual acquisition of language that is at stake but his/her commitment to language as a means of expression and fulfillment that is in jeopardy.

Winn also claims that a child watches T.V. with little mental effort, in a relaxed mode. He/she is not forming his/her own thoughts and feelings and forming them into words. "A pattern of nonverbal cognition becomes established." While the child is watching T.V. Winn is basically saying that the child is not critically analyzing what is going on throughout his/her mind.

Review Of The Literature For T.V. Commercials

Research on children's television and the effects of viewing commercials can be broken down into four areas: The medium of television, the child's developmental epoch, advertising as a program form and the social environment.

Children And The Medium Of Television

A child's preoccupation with a medium that doesn't allow for interaction amounts for much of the criticism lodged against television. Maccaby (1951) noted that television takes time away from other social interaction. Murray (1972) in a study of viewing behavior of young boys concluded that heavy T.V. viewers tend to be more interpersonally passive than other children. He also found that preschool viewing was inversely related to academic achievement in the first grade and inversely related to sociability. Medrich (1979) found that the poor and the less well-educated represent the majority of heavy T.V. viewing households.

Efron and Hickey (1981), Chaffee and McLeod (1969) and Schramm and Roberts (1971) found that children who were frustrated or insecure in home, school or peer environments tended to watch more T.V. They turned to the medium for companionship and solace.

Klapper's (1960) theory of "Selective Exposure" is important here. A child predisposed to certain behavior or program taste will expose himself or herself to those behaviors or programs. Sprafkin et.al. (1978) found that children who already displayed pro-social behavior were heavy viewers of pro-social television programming.

Children are heavy T.V. viewers. Two to five-year-olds spend over 33 hours per week watching T.V.; 6-11 year olds watch about 30 hours of T.V. per week. Advertisers spend an estimated $400M a year to beam their messages to these youngsters (Chagall, 1981:114). Children's advertising is big business. A case in point. In 1955 the Mattel Toy Company launched a TV based advertising campaign that propelled it from a $500,000 company to a $12M business almost overnight. (Jennings, 1970) Founder of the Center for Children, Media and Merchandising, Robert Choate, warns, "Parents must help their children to comprehend the totality of the message in the more than 20,000 commercials per year they view." (Choate, 1980:336)

Child's Developmental Epoch

Lyle and Hoffman (1972) found that first-graders were more likely to accept T.V. as "true-to-life" than sixth through tenth graders. Reeves and Greenberg (1977) concur that children infrequently used "real/unreal" dimensions to identify characters. Quarforth (1979) found that not until second grade could a majority of children differentiate human from animated and puppet characters. He also found that a substantial number of second through fourth graders demonstrated an incomplete understanding of the functioning of cartoons and puppet characters; however,

this understauding increases systematically each year. Lyle, Schramm and Parker (1972) found that bright children watched alot of television at an early age. They continue to watch a diverse and voluminous amount of television until age eleven. At that time they have become bored with the medium and turn to print material for information and engage in social endeavors for entertainment. The National Science Foundation (1977) found that by age three children already have established favorite programs and T.V. characters but it is not until age seven that they can separate the program content from the advertisements. Winick and Winick concur that up until the age of seven or thereabouts the child is certainly involved with their immediate gratification. They continue to state,

> "We may surmise that the children least able to sift commercials to be those who have not had a balanced socialization experience" (1973:85-86)

Dorr (1980) found that young children can learn after a short period of time about T.V., alternative sources of information and be able to reason about the reality of T.V. content. Singer, Singer and Zuckerman (1980) found that Third, Fourth and Fifth graders learned to understand and criticize T.V. programs and commercials as they developed materials to teach vocabulary words, writing skills, math and critical thinking skills. Salomon (1979) found that the visual conventions of television, such as zooms, cuts or close-ups guide the children's thinking. Salomon (1976) found that the development of cognitive skills is closely related to the experiences and demands of the culture in which one grows up. He cites Kagan and Klein's (1973) finding

that in remote and nontechnological societies, different types of experiences cultivated similar perceptual skills.

Cohen and Salomon (1979) identify "Literate viewing" (LV) as "the child's ability to extract information from the coded message in the viewing process " (1979: 159). They found that this was only partly dependent on the amount of time spent watching television. Singer's (1978) work on children and television draws from Bandura's "Social Learning Theory," (1971) to demonstrate that the information presented on T.V. has to be processed through internal rehearsal. He concludes that when the pace of presentation is fast, as it is in a television ad , the child can only process a little bit of the information. Jevon (1971) explains the limitations of processing a glut of information by stating that people defend themselves against bombardment of external stimuli,

Children's Advertising As A Program Form

Lesser, in his book about Sesame Street, offers the following rationale regarding the impact of advertising on children,

> "Any adult can supply anecdotes about children whose first spoken words were 'Budweiser,' 'Namath,' 'Clairol' or 'Axion' or who learned to spell 'Mickey Mouse' or 'Batman' before they could spell their own names...They do suggest the extent to which children can learn from television even when it is not deliberately designed to teach...maybe because no adult was presiding over the learning," (1974:20)

Winick and Winick draw from Piaget to deduce,

> "Television is so important a stimulus to the child that it feeds his interest in oral incorporation, via a visual and kinetic image and with entensive use of closeups," (1966:150)

Researchers agree that children "attend" to commercial messages.

The National Science Foundation (1977) concludes,

> "Research has demonstrated that children attend to and learn from commercials and that advertising is at least moderately successful in creating positive attitudes and the desire for the product advertised...A strong determinant of the children's perception of T.V. advertising is the child's age...(they) are more skilled in evaluating T.V. advertising as they grow older."

Lesser responds to criticism lodged against Sesame Street,

> "We had decided to use those elements of commercial messages that evoked substantial attention; change of pace and style, catchy jingles and rhymes, broad comedic devices and short, simple, straightforward presentations." (1974:188).

In a content analysis of children's T.V. commercials, Winick, et. al. found that "Markedly striking visual techniques, like fast cutting or psychodelic effects, are employed in all product types (of commercials) except cakes and vitamins " (1973:36). Zuckerman, Ziegler and Stevenson (1978) found that children as young as 3 or 4 have been found to increase their attention during commercials. However, Winick and Winick (1979) state that by age 8 or 9 children were found to shift their attention away from television commercials.

Several researchers questioned the ability of youngsters to discriminate program from advertising material. Many conclude that youngsters under 8 years old cannot explain the selling intent of commercials (Bever, Smith, Berger and Johnson, 1975; Robertson and Rossiter, 1974; Sheikh, Prasad and Rao, 1974; Ward, Wackman and Wartella, 1977)

In 1974 the F.C.C. required the T.V. networks to place separators between the children's programming and commercials. Palmer and McDowell (1979) found that these separators were not effective in aiding discrimination. Atkin (1975) found that

audio-visual disclaimers were more effective than the separators. Developmental epoch is also tied in with discrimination and trust. Blatt, Spencer and Ward (1972) found that children's trust in commercials declined as they got older.

In a study of the effectiveness of disclaimers, Liebert, Sprafkin, Liebert and Rubinstein (1977) emphasized the importance of using language appropriate to the age of the intended audience. Much research, thought and work goes into the creation of each T.V. commercial.

> "A children's T.V. commercial is carefully written, designed, usually musically scored with the help of private research agencies so as to maximize its impact on the young viewer." (Liebert, etal., 1982:136)

Winick and Winick's content analysis of children's T.V. commercials reveals the following findings regarding language:

-The first person singular is used in 43.6% of all commercials

-A second person mode of address i.e. a spokesman or character who speaks directly to the audience is used over nine-tenths of all commercials.

-Slogans or catchyphrases are employed in almost two-thirds of the commercials.

-Jingles occur in over two-fifths (41.4%) of the messages (1973:37-38)

The Winicks conclude that,

> "Simple language distinguishes all the commercials (93.2%)... Language of commercials is similar, in many ways, to that of fairytales -- a small number of characters, action is simple and concentrated, there are often fabulous beings and animals that do interesting things." (1973:39)

How is the language delivered? What is its source? The Winicks' study found that human or representative adults appear

as spokespeople most of the time (91.5%). The source of the voice is indicated in most (69.1%) messages. They suggest that preschoolers might become disturbed if not shown the source of the voice. (1973:25-27).

How else might T.V. commercials aid in language comprehension? The Winicks' study found that settings communicate reality in most (91.9%) of the messages; the present is offered more than four-fifths of the time. They consider that settings that are real and time in the present are more understandable to youngsters than the fantastic, future or past (1973:31-32). In the content analysis it was also found that 85% of the commercials contained at least "some" product information; specific references to the appearance, shape or packaging of a product occur to "some" extent in over 35% of the commercials (1973:15-16). They also found that audio or visual representations of abstract words associating the product with fun, joy, happiness or pleasure appear in almost half (43%)of the commercials.

How do T.V. commercials socialize the young viewers? Research has focused on violence, social stereotypes and parent-child relations. Much research concludes that social stereotyping occurs in the form of male authority figures highlighted and the under representation of females and minority characters (Atkin and Heald, 1977; Barcus, 1975, 1978; Sheutz and Sprafkin, 1978). Sheutz and Sprafkin (1979) also conclude that they found three times the amount of aggression exhibited in children's commercials than in the children's T.V. programming surrounding the messages. Goldberg and Porn (1977) suggest that negative attitudes toward parents are often inspired by children's T.V. commercials.

The Social Environment

Singer and Singer (1976) found that the availability of an adult to bridge the gap between T.V. performance and limited attention span can increase the benefit of the program. They conclude that children ages three and four are more susceptible to the influence of an adult who can engage them directly and provide immediate feedback for their own responses. Zuckerman, Singer and Singer (1980) found that parental viewing habits and attitudes toward T.V. remained a strong influence on children's behavior. Salomon (1976) concludes that children who are initially more skillful benefited most from the T.V. formats that called upon those skills; media effects on cognition interact with the child's initial level of skill mastery.

Ritti (1978) in the "Social Functions of Children's Speech" draws from Bernstein's (1961) finding that verbalization is socialized to appropriateness and appropriate verbalization also socializes.

Soskin and John (1963) identify five social/speech functions: Information, Directives (demands, requests), Inductives (needs, hopes, wishes), Evaluations (value statements) and Expressives (discharge tension).

Ritti found that the expectations of appropriate social behavior and subsequent choice of messages varied according to the grade level and sex of the children.

Singer and Singer (1976) found that direct imagination training and T.V. viewing helped increase spontaneous make-believe play which helps children in socialization. Cohen and Salomon (1979) conclude:

> "The construct of mental effort investment or depth of processing, during televiewing is important to 'Literate Viewing'...our data suggest that social norms as well as situational factors may exert significant influences on the quality of one's televiewing behavior" (1979:163)

Methodology

Thirty-six T.V. commercials were drawn from the following five "classic" cartoons: The Flintstones, The Bugs And Porky Show, Woody Woodpecker, Popeye and Heckle and Jeckle. They aired on Thursday and Friday, November 26th and 27th from 6:30 A.M. to 9:30 A.M. on WOR and WPIX, two independent television stations in New York. These cartoons were selected because they are available for children's viewing on a daily basis before they go to school.

The researchers realized while analyzing these cartoons that the language contained in the children's commercials appeared to provide some good language models. These commercials were also chosen for study because of the striking difference in the linguistic structures between the commercials and the cartoons that contained them.

A Language Grid was constructed to gather data while viewing the commercials. The grid contained the following overall categories: Semantics, Syntax, Morphology, Phonology and Pragmatics.

Concrete vocabulary was defined in the language grid as nouns contained in simple sentences such as: The boy played with a ball; words that could be associated easily with an object such as: Table, cup, fork, crayon and lamp. Words were also chosen that did not require much definition, such as simple verbs. e.g. Sleep, eat, jump and go.

Abstract vocabulary was defined as words that would need to be further interpreted to a school-aged child; words that are not directly associated with an object such as: Divide, freedom, join, lovely and curious. Also included in this classification

are categories that need definition such as: Communication, transportation and justice.

In the Syntax category, complete, incomplete sentences and phrases were charted. In the Morphology section of the grid, grammatically correct sentences and incorrect sentences were contrasted; and in the Phonology section, errors of articulation were charted as well as fast speech.

The researchers also recorded the following additional speech and language areas that fell outside of these categories: The use of cliches and slang words, the inclusion of foreign accents and voice deviations, the commercials pacing, the kind of visual stimuli offered and whether the visual stimuli corresponded to the verbal language offered in the commercials.

Under the category entitled Pragmatics the researchers charted the following: Maintanence of the topic, the provision of accurate information, pausing between comments, ample description of the products viewed, the existence of ambiguities in verbal expression, speaker sensitivity and sincerity, the logical sequencing of verbal material, appropriate turntaking, and the exhibition of pro-social behavior. This includes positive communicative attitudes, politeness, and friendliness between children and adults.

Results

Semantics:

Concrete Words:

The presence of concrete vocabulary words in these commercials serves to reinforce existing knowledge. Thirty-three percent (N=12) of the commercials analyzed were found to have a higher

proportion of concrete to abstract words. For example the Play-Doh Factory commercial used words such as: "snake, hose, spaghetti and star". In another commercial for the Strawberry Shortcake Home, children were exposed to the following words: "home, bed, bath". In an ad for the Pine Traffic Control Toy, the following concrete words appeared: "hop, skip, ride, pedal". For the boardgame Chutes and Ladders, children hear the following directives, "climb, up, down and land on". For the toy, The Show Beam Projector, some of the concrete words recorded were: "dad, cut, floor, and wall".

Children who viewed these commercials are offered the opportunity to hear words that they already know, enabling the child to rehearse the vocabulary by cognitive reinforcement and possible verbal repetition. These are words that occur in everyday communications between people. They are also words encountered in the primary school curriculum. Children exposed to these concrete words in an appealing fashion have an opportunity to rehearse them in other situational contexts. When a child recognizes a concrete word featured in a T.V. commercial, s/he may gain the confidence to use that word in verbal sentences in different physical settings.

Abstract Words:

Abstract words learned in appropriately constructed sentence contexts with the provision of visual stimuli will enhance language acquisition. Sixty-six percent (N=24) of the commercials tested were found to contain a higher proportion of abstract to concrete vocabulary words. In the commercial, Dungeons And Dragons Portress Of Fangs, children were exposed to the following

abstract words: "pretend, narrow, fear, strong and revenge". In a commercial for the toy Zoids Giant Zrk the following figurative and abstract words were detected: "giant, ferocious and futuristic". In the Hot Wheels Cargo Plane commercial, some abstract words include: "prepare, unload, real and listen". Onamatopeia aides the viewer in comprehending the abstract words found in the commercial for Popoids Colossal Cosmic Set. These include: "popping and snap". They are accompanied by words such as: "silly, frantic, wacky, rippling, tickling and bend . Words such as "imagination, creation and deluxe" were found in the Make And Move Deluxe Construction And Workbench Set commercial. These words are not attached to a referential object. Their comprehension is dependent upon the sentence context. Similarly in the commercial for the board game Candyland, the following abstract words were discovered: "discovery, careful, stuck, read, count, and visit". Another excellent example of abstract word use was found in the commercial Hatful of Magic. Words here include: "amaze, perform, teach, complete, secret, mystify and believe".

Many of the abstract words found in the commercials are characterized by exaggeration and hype. Words such as; "mystify, incredible and amazing" are examples of superlatives and hyperbole. These attention-getting words are a necessary component to the selling intent of the commercials. When sentences are well-formed and provide meaning to the abstract words, children can learn their correct usage in context.

Combined Concrete and Abstract Words:

Sentences embedded with a combination of concrete and abstract words offer the child an opportunity to learn new words that they can add to familiar vocabulary and concepts. A child draws upon the prior knowledge of concrete words to decipher a new abstract word. This is accomplished when the concrete words help to define the abstract word meaning. When an interesting abstract word is introduced among known concrete words in a sentence, the novelty of this word may generate interest. The child acts upon his/her interest by focusing in on the new word. Commercials typically emphasize the novel, the interesting and the attention getting. As a result, product sales are probable and language comprehension is possible.

In a commercial for the cereal Fruit Loops the concrete word "breakfast" is complemented by abstract words such as: "natural, delicious and nutritious". For another cereal, Rice Krispies, concrete words such as: "bowl, cereal and foot" were surrounded by "forgot, remember, and fun". A third cereal commercial for Cookie Krispies features concrete words, "cookie, chocolate," joined by abstract words such as: "prize, taste and winner". In the Luv Buds ad, abstract words such as: "love, play, collect and smell" accompany concrete words such as: "doll, hair, comb, water and flower".

The combination of abstract and concrete words found in the above commercials approximates daily communications and activities. It is interesting to note that commercials featuring foodstuffs all incorporate a combination of concrete and abstract words.

Syntax:

Since the child is expected to form complete sentences in the classroom, commercials that contain more complete sentences serve as a model to develop that skill. Fifty percent (N=18) of the commercials under study contain more complete sentences to phrases. For instance, in the commercial for Operation, sentences were noted to be well-formed in terms of structure. In another commercial for a boardgame, Stuff Your Face, the voice-over announcer serves as a good speech model, offering complete sentences. The complete sentences detected in the Fruit Loops commercial are embellished by figurative, abstract language. In the commercial for Hatful of Magic, good pausing between complete sentences was noted. This serves as a good speech model as pausing allows the listener time to grasp concept meaning. In a second commercial featuring majic, Magic World Of Blackstone, adequate pausing was also evident.

Exposure to these commercials can perhaps facilitate recognition of a complete sentence in written language. Research bears out a strong correlation between oral and written language. This knowledge of complete sentences can develop better reading comprehension and writing skills.

Combination of Complete Sentences and Phrases:

A combination of complete sentences and phrases is representative of everyday communication. Only thirteen percent (N=5) of the commercials viewed contain this combination. These include the following: Pines Traffic Control, Make N' Move Deluxe Construction And Workbench Set, Love Buds, Rice Krispies and Air Jammer Bug Scrammer. This realistic example of communication can enhance pragmatic skills. Children view correct communication

"volleys" that include both complete sentences and phrases. This is accomplished when the speakers interject their thoughts at appropriate times, maintain the topic of conversation and take turns in correct sequence.

Phrases:

Commercials that offer a predominance of phrases do not provide a model for grammatic closure in sentences. One-third of the commercials viewed (N=12) contain more phrases than complete sentences. However for daily conversation, speakers alternate initiating thoughts. These often take the form of phrases rather than full sentences. This was evident, for example, in the commercial for Hot Wheels Cargo Plane. Sometimes one word answers are appropriate when communicating. In Connect Four, one word questions and answers were provided.

Prepositional phrases used in an instructive situation develop knowledge of "place" words. For example, the commercial for Showbeam Projector, includes the following locative prepositional phrases: "on the wall...on the other wall...on the cat... and over there". These prepositional phrases were coupled by visual imagery that enhanced their comprehension. A grasp of prepositional phrases is necessary for taking directives in both the classroom and at home.

Commercial jingles aid in memorability and rhythm of speech. They are often composed of phrases. The engaging jingle that accompanied the Popoids Colossal Cosmic Set commercial featured phrases.

The researchers conclude that although the use of phrases does not provide for grammatic closure they are necessary in initiating conversation at times. Often times in dialogue a less-than-full sentence response is appropriate when communicating.

Cliches And Slang:

Cliches are ever-present in daily communication, easily understood, form part of our colloquialisms and facilitate easy comprehension. When cliches are presented in the commercials within appropriate contexts, a viewer can learn the cliches meaning or reinforce prior knowledge. Also to become part of their peer group and gain a sense of "belonging", teens use alot of cliche and slang words.

A little over half of the commercials studied (N=19) contain cliches and/or slang words. For example, in the commercial for Operation, "Here goes...butterfingers and steady hand" were noted. "Ready, set, go" is heard in the Stuff Your Face ad. British slang such as: "Tee off," "I fear you not" and " I shall have me revenge" were found in commercials for Fruit-loops and Dungeons and Dragons Fortress of Fangs, respectively. For a more American sampling, Stomper 4 by 4 offers "the going gets tough...pick up speed... and slick and mean." Familiar exclamatory phrases such as: "Oh boy...gee whiz and flip your lid" were featured by the adults in the Toys R'Us Commercial. In the Magic World of Blackstone, children are taught to "learn the ropes." The dancing, animated elves in the Rice Krispie commercial, exclaimed the following, "hit it... we're all ears...give you a hand and keyed up." "Gotcha" and "look out" are some slang words used in Connect Four.

These cliches are appealing and catchy as well as instructive. They serve to sell the product as well as provide examples for correct language usage. It should also be noted that slang adds variety and spice to verbal discourse. They are most appropriate in informal settings such as peer interchanges.

Morphology:

Correct Grammatic Sentences:

Obviously commercials that incorporate grammatically correct sentences serve as good language models. Contrary to T.V. commercials critics and to the surprise of these researchers, only one commercial contained one grammatically incorrect sentence. This error typified old English slang in "The vikings and the barbarians will do battle this day" in Crossbows and Catapults. The overwhelming number of grammatically correct sentences found in these commercials can most certainly provide the viewer with good sentence constructions. Familarity with correct grammar is known to aid in both oral, read and written comprehension.

Articulation:

It is well known that a T.V. commercial's intention is to captivate the audience in order to sell products. It is the advertiser's best interest to present the viewer with speakers using clear, articulate speech. Correct articulation is necessary for ample comprehension of the commercial's message. Children who are at a vulnerable stage in speech and language development are most receptive to good articulation models. The child's ease of comprehension increases the commercial's memorability; and therefore enhances the sales potential of the product advertised. It is well documented that children imitate and practice jingles, phrases and songs that they comprehend and find appealing. The jingles and songs provide a certain rhythmic

quality to speech which fosters their use. These varied speech patterns show the viewer different uses of intonation and inflection in their appropriate linguistic context.

Children are repeatedly exposed to many of the same commercials on a daily basis, thus enabling them to reinforce known sounds as well as learn new ones. A correlation exists between articulation, sound blending and phonetic reading. The process entails the following steps:

Articulation Processes

- attention
- auditory recognition and identification of sounds
- auditory discrimination of sounds
- cognitive sound blending and sequencing

Reading Processes

- visual attention
- letter-sound correspondence
- visual discrimination of letters
- visual sequencing of letters
- sound-letter analysis and blending
- sight word recognition

When viewing T.V. commercials on a daily basis, children invariably draw from the auditory process to help improve upon the visual process of reading. Reading skills are a major concern, both in the classroom and in everyday life situations.

Two-thirds of the commercials tested (N=22) present good, clear, articulate models of speech. In the commercial for Strawberry Shortcake Berry Happy Home, a female announcer sings in a clear, pleasant voice that is both attention-getting and relaxing.

The same holds true for the male singer in Air Jammer But Scrammer. In another commercial for the Play Doh Fun Factory, the children exhibited very clear articulation. Speakers expressed themselves nicely in the Zoids Giant Zrk commercial. The male announcer in the Candyland ad spoke with excellent speech sound production. In another boardgame, Shoots and Ladders, excellent articulation skills that promoted easy comprehension was noted. The researchers found that in all the boardgame commercials viewed, good articulation skills were prominent. It should also be noted that the announcer's voice modulation was pleasing to the listener. This was also evidenced in the announcer's voice in Hatful of Magic. In addition to speech modulation, the speaker in Tech-Sketch exhibited very fluent and well formed speech. The commercials featured speakers with very pleasing tonal voice qualities. The purpose of featuring these speakers who are easy to listen to is again tied to product sales. Not surprisingly, this priority in speaker selection offers children good speech models. The commercials that stand out in this area of good vocal quality includes: Rice Krispies, ShowBeam, Charmkins and Twix.

Pleasing voice qualities definitely aid in comprehension of spoken material. As most people would admit, it's very difficult to attend, listen to and retain information spoken by a person with a raspy or strident voice. Most of the commercials featured speakers with very pleasing tonal voice qualities.

For children to develop normal articulation and good voice habits, positive environmental models are necessary. Characters presented in T.V. commercials who mumble, jumble their sounds together, lisp, substitute speech sounds, shout or speak in high pitched voices do not serve as effective articulation models.

One-third of the commercials viewed (N=14) exhibited speech and voice models that were less favorable. Commercials that feature high-pitched voices both distort speech sounds as well as make listening difficult. This was the case, for instance, in the Barbie Dream Cottage commercial. In the ad for Record World, the announcer had adenasal voice quality as well as spoke in a sing-song voice. This, coupled with a sing-song quality, made it difficult to discern the total dialogue. In the Fruitloops commercial, the speaker's vocal pitch was low and some sounds were garbled as well. In another commercial, Etch-a-Sketch, the children raised their voices to speak above the sound effects. In the Monchhiche Dolls commercial, a child was noted to have a hoarse voice.

Fast speech deters both comprehension and retention of spoken material. In Hotwheels Cargo Plane, fast speech was used. Other commercials with this feature include Cookie Crisp, Luv Buds and Dungeon And Dragons Fortress of Fangs. Comprehensibility is reduced when jumbled sounds are spoken. Commercials detected with this problem include: Pines Traffic Control, Crossbows and Catapults and Toys R' Us. Despite the witty appeal of Toys R' Us, the busy background activity inhibited easy comprehension. The unclear speech exhibited in Crossbows And Catapults made it difficult for one researcher to discern phrases from sentences.

Overall the inclusion of good articulation models serves the interest of the advertiser. An overwhelming majority of the commercials present excellent articulate speech and voice models. These qualities, necessary for the success of a T.V. commercial, also benefit the child. As previously noted, good articulation and voice models presented in these T.V. commercials have the potential to develop reading skills.

In defense of those commercials where fast speech and jumbled sounds were noted, the limited time frame of the commercial must be recognized. The deficiencies of speech and use of voice in commercials can be overcome by multiple exposure to the commercials.

Pragmatics:

The pragmatics of communication deal with the effective use of language in interpersonal exchanges. The areas that we investigated include the following:

- maintaining the topic of conversation
- providing accurate information
- ample descriptions of products viewed
- ambiguities in verbal expression
- speaker sensitivity and sincerity
- turn taking of speakers
- pro-social models of speech
- logical order of dialogue presented

Maintaining The Topic Of Conversation

Topic Maintanence is necessary for the listener to comprehend the theme of the communication intent as well as to focus on appropriate details and make sense of contextual material. This is an integral part of the language learning process afforded by T.V. commercials. This may serve as a model for appropriate verbal sequential reasoning and thought. This affords the child greater self-confidence and credibility with others.

All of the commercials viewed (N=36) demonstrated maintanence of the topic. In a thirty second commercial, the viewer can only receive one key selling idea surrounded by complimentary details.

It comes as no surprise that the commercials viewed, easily maintained the topic of conversation. This is a necessary element for persuasion. Children view the successful intentions to persuade others in T.V. commercials. They can model their own verbal behavior for environment mastery and need gratification.

Providing Accurate Information

In order to maintain credibility with one's peers it is essential to input information that is truthful. Accurate information must be appropriate to the physical and social setting. Good speakers must be perceptive to the emotional climate of the situation to present their thoughts appropriately. Use of details to describe a situation affords the speaker greater variability in their interpersonal relationships.

With three exceptions (N=33), all of the commercials provided accurate information. Parental concern and legislative mandate oversee the fairness of presentation of T.V. commercials. It is also in the best interest of the advertiser to deliver what is promised. Accurate information presented on T.V. commercials prepares the child for first hand experiences in real life. Accurate information aids in following directives. For example, a child who watches the Chutes And Ladders commercials has some idea on how to go about playing the game. Following directions is critical to good academic achievement.

Ample Descriptions Of Products

Use of figurative language in describing a product makes it more enticing to the viewer. Not only does it increase sales but it also develops adjective use in young children when heard on a consistent basis.

Children can't help but be attracted to, attend and incorporate this vocabulary into their verbal repertoire. This validates the child's previous experience with descriptions. Confirmation of existing knowledge leads to the practice and rehearsal that will take place afterward. For example, children repeat what they heard on commercials when they see the product in a real-life situation.

Eighty-six percent (N=31) of the commercials viewed did provide ample descriptions of the products advertised. Relevant attributes with good detail were offered when speaker interaction was positive. Commercials that emphasize motor skills above verbal interaction naturally are less descriptive. Figurative language both attracts the viewer and adds spice to conversation.

Speaker Sensitivity And Sincerity

Belief and trust are engendered by the sincere and sensitive speaker. This shapes positive attitudes and appropriate behavior. As appealing qualities, sensitivity and sincerity are attractive to viewers and is necessary to persuasive communication. This model is contrary to the cold and insensitive teen hero that children try to emulate. The presentation of speaker sensitivity and sincerity socializes the child toward cooperation, altruism and positive interaction.

Ninety-percent of the commercials (N=33) viewed featured a sincere and sensitive speaker. For instance, in the Strawberry Shortcake Berry Happy Home commercial, the children were polite and courteous exclaiming "welcome everybody".

A sensitive speaker is a good listener as s/he is concerned with the needs of others. It was noted from viewing these commercials that adult and children alike listened actively to their peers and to each other. Sincere speakers are likeable, attractive and natural. They're the perfect salespeople and communicators.

Turn Taking

Turn taking enables people to share ideals, beliefs and feelings. It places speakers on equal footing as they are encouraged to interact in a giving manner. Turn taking stimulates active participation amongst individuals in a group setting. It provides an organized forum centering on a main theme, and allowing for transitions to new subjects. By offering information and asking questions you learn about others and develop friendships. This facilitates group acceptance and sociability.

Several commercials viewed (N=8) demonstrate excellent turn taking skills. For instance, in the Play Doh Fun Factory, children played nicely and serve as good behavior models. In the commercial for Operate, children react nicely with mother and take turns amongst themselves. While playing the game, one child said "It's my turn to operate", emphasizing the concept of turn-taking. Children cooperated in play in the Popoids Colossal Cosmic Set commercial. In the Candyland ad, the children's turntaking helps direct the viewer to follow the game's directions. Good turn taking skills are essential to behavior in formal settings such as school and business.

Pro-social Models

It is important for children to be exposed to pro-social models of behavior so they can carry over those attitudes with their own interpersonal relationships. Speakers in T.V. commercials who exhibit pro-social traits break down parental resistance to the product advertised and lead to commercial acceptance. Pro-social messages are more readily received by the public also resulting in increasing sales. Within the commercials positive reinforcement in terms of ccoperative game playing is demonstrated by both children and adults. Here the advertisers reward pro-social behavior by exhibiting children and adults engaged in enjoyable activities. This reward system stimulates knowledge of appropriate behavior in both formal and informal settings. Again, the advertiser and viewer both benefit from the climate created by pro-social models of attitude.

A little over fifty-percent of the commercials studied (N=19) feature pro-social models. In the Play Doh Fun Factory commercial, children interacted nicely and laughed congenially. Children are shown to be appropriately animated and excited in the ad for Crystal Castle. In another commercial, Strawberry Shortcake Berry Happy Home, children were very polite to one another. They were also properly animated. This also included excellent role models of a pretend situation whereby children are engaged in their own play of adult role models. For example, a child bathes and grooms a doll. For another dollhouse ad, Barbie Dream Cottage, a positive male image is featured. For instance, while the children play with the dolls, the father says," This looks like fun. Can I be invited?

In turn, the children also ask the parents for help, demonstrating appropriate forms of requesting behaviors and cooperation between parent and child. In the Operate commercial, there was positive interaction between the children and one female parent. The children were also polite, as they asked, "Mom, may I play?" Also in the Charmkins ad the children are polite and courteous. Positive sibling relationships were demonstrated in Zoids Giant Zrk accompanied by the announcer who states, "It's safe, even in the hands of your little sister", upon which she laughs appropriately. In the Popoids Colossal Cosmic Set commercial, children play cooperatively, with acceptable laughter and smiling. Parents join in game play with children in the Candyland commercial. They interacted nicely with one another in that correct listening skills and thought initiation were displayed.

Salutations and introductions are used in the Pines Traffic Control advertisement. The children greet one another and wave to each other. Also, a traditional family setting with good sibling interaction is demonstrated in the Connect 4 commercial.

The Toys R' Us commercial featured adults interacting in a fun, relaxed and non-threatening manner. The parents are non-authoritative in this commercial and possibly less intimidating to children. In the animated Rice Krispie commercial, the child relates favorably to the dancing elves. This demonstrates a positive attitude toward unusual characters. Good eye contact was displayed between the speakers in the Air Jammer Bug Scrammer commercial. To summarize, the following pro-social characteristics were found in the commercials tested:

- good child-to-child sibling and child-to-parent interaction
- appropriate animation, laughter and smiling
- courtesy and politeness among speakers

- appropriate adult activities role-played by children
- positive adult male and female images
- ample request behaviors and cooperation
- traditional family settings
- initiation and joining-in behaviors to group activities
- good listening skills
- use of salutations and introductions
- non-authoratian, non-threatening adult models
- acceptance of the novel and the unusual
- good eye contact and attending skills

The above list of characteristics help to socialize the child in different social and physical contexts.

Logical Order Of Sequence Of Events

A logical order of events helps a person attend to the message and gain meaning from the general theme. This aids the child in verbal expressive sequential skills. It has positive implications for general organization of thought patterns and ideas as well as improved listening comprehension, reading and writing skills. It provides the child with s ructured communication that is present in read and written material. It is well known that structured aural situations prepare the youngster to deal with and expect similar patterns of story formulation in read material. Also, the child infers from this structured communication when writing sentences for school reports. The logical order of events assists the child in making sense of the storyline.

With a child's grasp of logical order, s/he can predict future events. The brief amount of time alloted in each commercial forces the advertiser to insure that the message is easily grasped. This is best achieved when the events are presented in a concise and logical order. It comes as no surprise that 100 percent (N=36) of the commercials viewed exhibited this trait.

Video-Auditory Correspondence

Verbal material when coupled with visual stimuli aids in easy message comprehension. Both abstract and concrete words are reinforced by the visual imagery provided. This clarifies the message intent and helps the viewer follow the storyline. It also enables the viewer to understand the meaning of new words from the auditory and the visual context. The visual cues provided reinforce the language used and aid in memorability. More attention to the commercial is gained when a direct correlation exists between the visual and aural.

Almost half (N=17) of the commercials studied presented the verbal material in conjunction with good visual clues. For instance, in the Rough Riders Impossible commercial, words such as "twisting and snap" were demonstrated visually. In the Rice Krispie ad, the cartoon elves brought meaning to the cliche, "guess I got too keyed up", as he danced on a piano key. The Show Beam Projector was focused on different parts of a room while accompanied by verbal material. In another demonstration, this one in the Charmkins commercials, children "smelled" the fragrant jewelry while describing their action. It is quite obvious that verbal material matched by visual clues and/or imagery definitely aid in attention, focus, comprehension and retention of the message.

Pacing And Speech Pauses

In order to hold a child's attention, the commercial must be at least moderately paced. If the pacing is too fast the child may have difficulty following the commercial's message for the following reasons: S/he could confuse the facts and may be overwhelmed by excessive stimuli going on; the fast pacing could further reduce the child's limited attention span and the child could forget the commercial's storyline. Focus, understanding and memorability are dependent upon the rhythm and pacing of the commercial.

Fifty-five percent of the commercials viewed (N=20) were noted to be moderately paced. Another twenty-percent of the commercials (N=7) were paced moderate-to-fast. An equal percentage (N=6) were fast paced. The majority of the commercials were moderately paced. This serves both the interest of the advertiser in an abbreviated thirty-second format and creates a comfortable setting for the child.

Time must be alotted in conversation for speakers to pause and interject their thoughts in group situations. The T.V. commercial viewer needs pauses in the dialogue to follow and synthesize the message. An overwhelming majority of the commercials were correctly paced so that the speakers could pause using ample time frames between thoughts. This permits the child to gather, analyze and story information during the pauses. Pausing makes a dialogue intelligible as well as add emphasis to key points. It gives the viewer a chance to internally summarize previous statements and provides for an orderly execution of thoughts. Pausing and appropriate pacing of speech is essential in daily communications.

Guidelines

As children will continue to watch television commercials because of their various appeal, parents and educators must seize the opportunity to use commercials as an instructional tool.

Our research found that commercials can possible stimulate the acquisition of new abstract words when placed in proper sentence contexts. Known concrete words can also be reinforced and rehearsed. Also, commercials that present the viewer with grammatically correct sentences, cliches and easy-to-follow storylines that are moderately paced and well-articulated, can reinforce already normally developing language skills.

As parents share the home environment with their child, television commercials can be another tool used to promote parent-child communication as well as the sharpening of existing language skills. Parents can make instructive use of commercials prior to, during and after viewing the commercials with their child.

Prior To Viewing

Parents should make note of frequently viewed commercials. This will not be difficult since these commercials usually appear on a daily basis or at least several times per week. The parents can elicit information in the form of a dialogue by asking wh-questions such as,"What is your favorite commercial?" and why did you like it?" Discussion about the commercials can then take place between parent and child. This discourse will take on the form of questions and answers. More specific questions could then be asked by the parents to stimulate thinking skills as well as arouse the child's interest.

First, the parent can test for the child's logical sequencing of events by asking,"what was the commercial about?" The parents should follow-up with, "what happened in the commercial?" To encourage use of adjectives in concrete and abstract vocabulary, the parent should question,"what did the speakers look like?" More specific questions are, "how were they dressed?" "who did you like?" "why?" To further strengthen discourse and the child's use of vocabulary words, the parent can ask, "where did the commercial take place" and "what did it look like?"

With respect to turn taking, the parent must provide information to the child based upon his/her verbal comments. This focuses the communication between the speakers and fosters discourse.

To promote vocabulary the parent can ask, for instance, "tell me three words that you heard in this commercial that begin with the 'B' sound." This helps to encourage listening skills. Free association techniques can be used by the parent asking the child,"tell me all the words you heard in this commercial." The parent then writes down these words on paper. To stimulate the creation of complete sentences, the parent can then say "now, make up a sentence with this word_____." Once the parent determines that a correct sentence was spoken, s/he can assist the child in writing that complete sentence. In another exercise the parent can categorize the words offered by the child about a a particular commercial. For instance the child offers words such as "red, bell, dog and rice krispies." The parent instructs "red is a color" and then asks, "tell me three more colors that you know." The parent follows with "a bell makes noise" and asks,"what other objects make noise." Labelling a dog as an animal, the parent requests, "tell me three other animals." With a specific

word or name such as Rice Krispies the parent first asks "what is it?" The child would answer, "a cereal." The parent then uses the child's response as a category when s/he says "tell me three other cereals you know." The parent can also take this word list and generate antonym and synonyms from the child by asking "what other words mean the same thing" and "what words are opposite."

Role play generates further discussion as well as enhances meaning to the dialogue. For instance, parent and child can simulate supermarket shoppingby buying foodstuffs right off the cupboard shelves. This is the perfect time for parents to discuss nutrition and a balanced diet with their child.

<u>During The Commercial</u>:

To develop discipline and structure in listening and learning situations the parent should accompany the child in watching the commercial and at key moments provide clues such as "look" and "listen." The parent should also encourage the child to sing with the jingle as well as imitate key phrases and sentences. They can also encourage the child to pantomime the actions on the screen. This will enhance participation and promote free body movement. It makes learning a more natural and enjoyable experience.

An exercise that requires more preparation time consists of matching pictures from newspapers and magazines to the child's initial vocabulary list. This list should be beside the television set during the commercials' viewing. When a child hears the word in the commercial, s/he can point to the picture or word, as appropriate. This list, with accompanying pictures, should be updated periodically.

Following Viewing Of The Commercial

The parent can explain abstract words to the child that may require definition. The parent can also point out interesting cliches and slang words. To gauge the child's interest, the parents should ask "what did you like or dislike about this commercial?" Parents should be careful to note any general responses and follow the child's lead. This can be accomplished by being supportive of the child and only adding relevant linguistic material to the child's comments. This is in accordance with the findings of Newhoff and Browning, 1983 .

Parent and child should analyze the commercial content to discern the advertiser's intent as well as determine the product's worth. This draws upon and strengthens the child's cognitive and reasoning skills. The child will have to use logical reasoning in his or her defense. This is accomplished when the child generates new sentences, maintains the topic of discussion and persuades the parent to believe his/her argument. The parent should question the child about speaker sincerity and credibility. Questions such as "do you believe s/he's telling the truth?" "why?" is appropriate. When the parent offers a supportive, listening ear, the child gains confidence in self-expression as well as learns how to take a stand.

It is important for children to be active listeners while attending to the commercials in order to make correct judgements. This places the viewer in an active, rather than a passive role. To keep the child thinking on his or her feet, the parent should display skepticism, such as: "Do you <u>really</u> <u>think</u> that this brand of cereal will make you stronger than the other brand?"

Children should be asked to compare and contrast commercials for similar products as well as for different advertising techniques.

The parent can ask "why do you like this commercial and not (the other one)?" In their responses, children should be encouraged to use figurative language in complete sentences. The child's preferred commercials can serve as models because of the child's demonstrated interest. Parents could emphasize the appearance of pro-social models in the child's preferred commercials. The parents can also reinforce the existence of good grammar, good articulation and good voice qualities in these chosen commercials. The fact that children behave nicely should be highlighted.

Parents can simulate another shopping situation where they offer the child $5.00, for instance, to purchase what they want. In turn the parent makes up the prices of items and has the child defent how the money is spent. Discussions can then follow, regarding item need, consumerism, getting your money's worth and product value. All parents share a similar concern over their child's whimsical desire for all products advertised. The compare and contrast method, the skeptical questioning and the money simulation should aid in alleviating this problem.

Other exercises include: reviewing the commercial's actions, explanation of the topic within the sequence of events, creating sentences using abstract words that were recalled from the commercial, explaining the motivation behind the speaker's actions. For example, "why do you think the children behave so nicely?" and use of figurative language to describe favorite commercials.

Conclusion

Parents and educators alike are concerned with the effects of television viewing on children's language and speech acquisition. Children will continue to watch commercials despite the criticisms of adults. This study evaluated the factors that contribute to language acquisition as well as research on the effects of viewing commercials on children.

The researchers found positive elements for language acquisition contained in the commercials that can only be stimulated by a parent model in the home or school environment. Various guidelines on the instructive use of commercials were offered. Parents can use these guidelines before, during or after the commercial viewings. In the researchers' judgement, it is the quality of parent-child interaction about television commercials, as opposed to the quantity of time spent watching television that determines language acquisition.

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